

Remarks on Senate Action on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and an Exchange With Reporters

October 13, 1999

The President. Good evening. I am very disappointed that the United States Senate voted not to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. This agreement is critical to protecting the American people from the dangers of nuclear war. It is, therefore, well worth fighting for. And I assure you, the fight is far from over.

I want to say to our citizens, and to people all around the world, that the United States will stay true to our tradition of global leadership against the spread of weapons of mass destruction. The Senate has taken us on a detour. But America eventually always returns to the main road, and we will do so again. When all is said and done, the United States will ratify the test ban treaty.

Opponents of the treaty have offered no alternative, no other means of keeping countries around the world from developing nuclear arsenals and threatening our security. So we have to press on and do the right thing for our children's future.

We will press on to strengthen the worldwide consensus in favor of the treaty. The United States will continue, under my Presidency, the policy we have observed since 1992 of not conducting nuclear tests. Russia, China, Britain, and France have joined us in this moratorium. Britain and France have done the sensible thing and ratified this treaty. I hope not only they, but also Russia, China, will all, along with other countries, continue to refrain from nuclear testing.

I also encourage, strongly, countries that have not yet signed or ratified this treaty to do so. And I will continue to press the case that this treaty is in the interest of the American people.

The test ban treaty will restrict the development of nuclear weapons worldwide at a time when America has an overwhelming military and technological advantage. It will give us the tools to strengthen our security, including the global network of sensors to detect nuclear tests, the opportunity to demand onsite inspections, and the means to

mobilize the world against potential violators. All these things, the Republican majority in the Senate would gladly give away.

The Senators who voted against the treaty did more than disregard these benefits. They turned aside the best advice—let me say this again—they turned aside the best advice of our top military leaders, including the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and four of his predecessors. They ignored the conclusion of 32 Nobel Prize winners in physics, and many other leading scientists, including the heads of our nuclear laboratories, that we can maintain a strong nuclear force without testing.

They clearly disregarded the views of the American people who have consistently and strongly supported this treaty ever since it was first pursued by Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy. The American people do not want to see unnecessary nuclear tests here or anywhere around the world.

I know that some Senate Republicans favored this treaty. I know others had honest questions but simply didn't have enough time for thorough answers. I know that many would have supported this treaty had they been free to vote their conscience and if they had been able to do what we always do with such treaties, which is to add certain safeguards, certain understandings that protect America's interest and make clear the meaning of the words.

Unfortunately, the Senate majority made sure that no such safeguards could be appended. Many who had questions about the treaty worked hard to postpone the vote because they knew a defeat would be damaging to America's interest and to our role in leading the world away from nonproliferation. But for others, we all know that foreign policy, national security policy has become just like every domestic issue—politics, pure and simple.

For 2 years, the opponents of this treaty in the Senate refused to hold a single hearing. Then they offered a take-or-leave-it deal: to decide this crucial security issue in a week, with just 3 days of hearings and 24 hours of debate. They rejected my request to delay the vote and permit a serious process so that all the questions could be evaluated. Even worse, many Republican Senators apparently

committed to oppose this treaty before there was an agreement to bring it up, before they ever heard a single witness or understood the issues. Never before has a serious treaty involving nuclear weapons been handled in such a reckless and ultimately partisan way.

The Senate has a solemn responsibility under our Constitution to advise and consent in matters involving treaties. The Senate has simply not fulfilled that responsibility here. This issue should be beyond politics, because the stakes are so high. We have a fundamental responsibility to do everything we can to limit the spread of nuclear weapons and the chance of nuclear war. We must decide whether we're going to meet it.

Will we ratify an agreement that can keep Russia and China from testing and developing new, more sophisticated advanced weapons; an agreement that could help constrain nuclear weapons programs in India, Pakistan, and elsewhere, at a time of tremendous volatility, especially on the Indian subcontinent? For now, the Senate has said, no.

But I am sending a different message. We want to limit the nuclear threat. We want to bring the test ban treaty into force.

I am profoundly grateful to the Senate proponents of this treaty, including the brave Republicans who stood with us, for their determination and their leadership. I am grateful to all those advocates for arms control and national security and all the religious leaders who have joined us in this struggle.

The test ban treaty is strongly in America's interest. It is still on the Senate calendar. It will not go away. It must not go away. I believe that if we have a fair and thorough hearing process, the overwhelming majority of the American people will still agree with us that this treaty is in our interest. I believe in the wisdom of the American people, and I am confident that in the end, it will prevail.

Q. Mr. President, when you say the fight is far from over, sir, do you mean that you expect this treaty to be brought up again during your term in office?

The President. I mean, I think that—we could have had a regular hearing process in which the serious issues that need to be discussed would have been discussed, and in which, as the Senate leaders both agreed yesterday when they thought there was an

agreement and they shook hands on an agreement, would have resulted in next year being devoted to considering the treaty, dealing with its merits, and then, barring extraordinary circumstances, would have put off a vote until the following year.

By their actions today the Republican majority has said they want us to continue to discuss and debate this. They weren't interested in the safeguards; they weren't interested in a serious debate; they weren't interested in a serious process. So they could have put this on a track to be considered in an appropriate way, which I strongly supported. They decided otherwise.

And we, therefore, have to make it clear, those of us who agree, that it is crazy for America to walk away from Britain and France, 11 of our NATO Allies, the heads of our nuclear labs, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 32 Nobel laureates, and the whole world, having depended on us for all these decades, to lead the fight for nonproliferation. Therefore, we have to keep this issue alive and continue to argue it in the strongest and most forceful terms.

I wish we could have had a responsible alternative. I worked until the 11th hour to achieve it. This was a political deal. And I hope it will get the treatment from the American people it richly deserves.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:37 p.m. outside the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks at a Democratic Leadership Council Gala

October 13, 1999

Thank you. Let me say, first, it's good to be back. I want to thank Al From and Senator Joe Lieberman. And I have seen Senator Robb and Senator Breaux. I understand Senator Landrieu is here. I saw Cal Dooley, and I know there are some other Members of the House here. My former Chief of Staff and Envoy to Latin America, Mack McLarty, is here. I saw Harris Wofford, who has done a magnificent job with our national service program. And I know there are a lot of others here.